WBAA (1)

Looking for What?
Mark 1:29-39
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→ Read Mark 1: 32-37

They were common people: fishermen, herdsmen, carpenters, husbands and wives, the very old and the very young. Just average people whose every energy was devoted to the provision of food, clothing and shelter. ~~They certainly were not philosophers or theologians.~~ They were not even particularly religious. ~~They had neither the time for nor the inclination toward the formalities of institutionalized piety. If asked, they probably could not have done a very credible job of articulating their own needs – beyond the physical necessities of life.~~ They had one thing in common. They had heard the news about Jesus of Nazareth and had come looking for him.

Since the first of the year we have been following the lectionary through the first chapter of Mark's Gospel. The intent of this exercise has been to acquire a "feel" for the immense and immediate impact Jesus had on the people around him. The sequence of events is fairly simple. In Mark's Gospel it begins with his Baptism experience at the Jordan river. It proceeds with the call of four fisherman to follow him: moving into Peter's house at Capernum: teaching in the Synagog there: confronting the power of the demonic. Mark notes that "the news spread rapidly, and he was soon spoken of all over the district of Galilee."

The scene ~~today~~ is evening, after sundown, the sabbath was over. And apparently the whole town of Capernum gathered in front of Peter's house: people brought their sick relatives and friends: the emotionally disturbed. He talked with them: healed them. Early the next morning he took a walk – to be alone for a few minutes. But Peter and the others found him and told him that the crowd had come back. People were looking for him.

I see in this series of pictures, the profile of a man who struck a responsive chord in the lives of a lot of people. ~~Whatever their own sense of their deepest needs,~~ they were moved by what they had heard to get up about him

3:32

early in the morning and go out looking for the man.

All men are looking for something. It seems to be an inherent part of the human spirit - the search - this quest for something real, something authentic, something more than life appears to offer on the surface of things. We are part of that eternal searching - like all men before us. But today, I would suggest, man's relentless "looking for something" is punctuated by a new impatience - a new restlessness.

The difference between the quest of humanity - and the particular form of the search evident in our generation was graphically illustrated in a motion picture I recently saw. The elder son of an old-line Italian family is getting a divorce, and his parents are terribly upset. When the son comes home for the wedding of his younger brother the parents choose the occasion to try to reverse the course of events. In the process of a long and heated discussion they drag out every cliche, every time honored defense of marriage. Finally, sensing the futility of the project, his father asks: "Richie - what do you want?" Richie answers with one word: "Happiness." To which his mother responds "Why do you want happiness? It will only make you miserable." Later, at the reception, Papa tries to use the spirit of the affair to pursue the subject further: He takes his son aside and says: "Richie, what's happiness anyway? Your mama and I - we're not happy - but we're content." And then in a moment of real candor Papa tells him about the exciting woman he almost married and didn't. Richie understands, but not the part about sacrificing happiness. Contentment isn't enough. A marriage isn't worth saving if all it offers is the comfort of a well worn shoe. And the conversation ends having - I believe - clearly defined that added impatience which is an important part of man's search today.

That's what I think people mean when they talk about the "now generation". A new breed of person is demanding immediate gratification, immediate meaning - and is totally unwilling to fall into the old routine of

waiting for something great to happen some day in the future. The search is on - with impatience this time around. And the path is littered with the broken fragments of a lot of time - hallowed traditions and institutions.

Consider two. Think about the institution of marriage. Divorce rates reveal that an increasing number of people are no longer willing to go through the motions of marriage for the sake of preserving an institution. And the law of the State of Indiana is about to be changed to reflect that new impatience. If the bill under consideration makes it - and it looks as if it will - a marriage may be disolved on the basis of "irrevocable differences". That is to say, there will no longer be a defendant - just an agreement between two people that it is best to throw in the towel. Now, that can be both good and bad - although I personally feel that it will make a painful human experience a great deal less painful. But the point is - it reflects our growing impatience - and our unwillingness to relinquish our search for whatever it is we're looking for.

Or, think about the college situation. It wasn't too long ago that an eighteen year old went to college in order to get a degree, in order to get a job, in order to make a lot of money. If he became unhappy somewhere along the line, he could get over the rough spots by recalling again that the end of the process would make it all worth while. You and I were told, and we tell our children - as if it were Holy Writ - "You have to get an education." And today's student asks, simply, "Why?" - "What if you're not interested in vaulting into the middle class? What if you rejected the value system of middle America? What if you fail to see the connection between Econ 501 and becoming a full and honest person? What if you add up everything you're spending your time doing and come up with a big, fat zero?" Well, if you and I thought like that, we rapidly repressed it because we were willing to suffer a little meaninglessness for the sake of what we were going to get later. But that day is gone. Just being in college isn't enough

any more. And our apparent inability to deal with that: to make education an experience with meaning now - not just later: coupled with our refusal to listen when our own children bring their impatient search into our living rooms - has resulted in the distrubing number of drop-outs who simply hang around, experimenting with drugs, celebrating life, and waiting for something significant to happen.

I think we're playing a whole new ball game in this respect. I think people are looking for something today - with a new, potentially healthy, impatience. I think you and I are coming to sense that there is a whole lot more to life than we are experiencing. And I think we are beginning to see that the overwhelming "impersonality" of our culture, our institutions, our own life style is somehow at the heart of it all.

Dr. Wade Huie, writing about the rich, young ruler who asked Jesus what he had to do to find eternal life, describes, in capsule form, the quest of modern man. "Something is missing. Joy? Power? Freshness? Excitement? He knows the rules.... he follows the proper routine. He has gone to church all his life. Yet in all his doing he does not find meaning and purpose. He plays the right notes, but why is the sound of the music sour? .... He yearns for the real instead of the phony..... He may have tried everything - but still yearns for the personal, the human, the affectionate." [The Protestant Hour, Aug, 16 - 1970 #8]

And Simon and Garfunkle struck a responsive chord with "The Sound of Silence".

" People talking without speaking,
People hearing without listening,
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dare disturb
The sound of silence."

Dr. Paul Tournier, distinguished Swiss physician and psychiatrist wrote

a book under the title "The Meaning of Persons". In the chapter "This impersonal World", he describes a late night encounter with a man who knocked on his door. [p. 28-29] "I have come to you because I am looking for life." The man had just come from a very fashionable party in Geneva, with a guest list that included many figures of international stature, wealth and power. But it was all a farce: a large game of manouvering, positioning, small talk, name dropping, everybody saying the right things - but avoiding authentic human contact. "I am looking for life..... I am not living a real life at all."

Well - what is it? ~~What is real life?~~ What are you looking for? What is it that moves you day after day and week after week?

Can we call it happiness? If so, what does that mean? Can we call it meaning? - a word so overworked that I don't know what it includes. Is it a better life style for your family? Is it more money? Security? What are you looking for?

I expect that each of us could spend quite a lot of time thinking about that one. And I'm not at all sure that we could be honest enough with ourselves to come up with an authentic answer. I'm not sure we know what it is we are looking for - only that whatever it is - we don't have it.

Ruel Howe - ~~in an excellent book that I would commend to you - "Man's Need and God's Action"~~, suggests that when everything else is said and done your greatest need, and mine, is to be loved and to love. He puts it this way: "Some of our wants are immediate and superficial, some of them are deeper; but the deepest one of all is the desire to be at one with someone, to have someone who can be at one with us, and through whom we can find at-oneness with all." [p.9]

I think that is true. I think that makes a lot of sense theologically. Beginning with the first story in the Bible man is described as cut off from the very source of his life! alientated from God, estranged. And the first

by-product is that same separateness from other men. We exist in lonliness. In the preface to his classic "Look Homeward Angel", Thomas Wolfe put it in these words:

> "Naked and alone we came into exile.... Which of us has not remained forever prison-bent? Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone..... Lost! Remembering speechlessly we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven..... an unfound door. Where? When?"

What are we looking for? Let me suggest - love - a feeling of oneness with others - a sense of being "at home" in the world and among other people. Let me suggest that beneath our impatient searching - our relentless demand for life to cough up something more - each of us is trying to reach out for that indescribable miracle called "communion".

Let me suggest that we are doing it all the time - mostly indirectly; mostly without identifying the inner gnawing that is motivating us. Let me suggest that we do it in our frantic joining - and in our overloaded schedules packed with activity. Let me suggest that we do it sexually - desperately looking for that someone who will be at one with us, and whose willingness to give that gift to us is a reminder that there is something stale and lost and missing.

Let me suggest that young people turn to drugs and the whole drug sub-culture, looking for that same communion and at-oneness. Let me suggest that common people, like you and me, reach out to each other all the time, in simple little gestures that well up out of our own sense of aloneness. And when we turn to each other we discover another totally preoccupied with his own search, his own problems, without time to listen, without the grace to meet our deepest need.

Jesus moved men. The man, Jesus of Nazareth, broke through the silence somehow and touched individual lives - sick lives, broken lives, lonely,

desperate, alienated lives. That's why the whole town gathered at Peter's house. That's why the news spread so rapidly throughout Galilee that the crowd assembled in the early light of morning. They came looking for him - because they sensed in him - the ability, the power - to awaken and to meet their deepest need.

Jesus touched them where they lived by taking them seriously: fishermen, herdsmen, husbands and wives, old and young, tax collectors, prostitutes; he reached into each life with love and compassion - and then a miracle happened. Through him people found themselves in touch with God. People sensed that when Jesus of Nazareth dealt with them - they were being dealt with by God himself. So the carpenter of Nazareth came to be known among them as Jesus the Christ. And the more they were touched by him, the more they found themselves in touch with each other. It was a new experience: new and liberating and exciting: and it carried with it that sense that this is what living really means. This is what I've needed and been missing and been looking for.

That's what's going on in Mark 1. That's the Good News. We call it the Gospel - because it is available. It is as close as your neighbor, your husband, your wife, your friends. The Good News is that in Jesus Christ God gave himself to us - to be at-one with us - and to put us in touch with each other.

A very long time ago Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, wrote a prayer. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee." That's good. But someone has changed that prayer - and the change expresses what I have been trying to say:

"Thou hast made us for Thyself and for one another, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee in one another, and in one another in Thee."

That is how it always is. Jesus put men in touch with God. We shall

find God, too, in each other. And in so doing, in caring and listening and loving - find what it is we've been looking for.

Amen.

O God, we know you have made us restless until we find rest in you. We know that our search is only an expression of the potential for full life that you have given us. Help us, our father, to find each other. Help us over the barriers that seperate us. For we know that in each other - in oneness with man - there is rest in you. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.